



PETER SOMM

(Sulgen 1940–lives and works in Herrenschwanden)

Untitled. 2011.

Acrylic on canvas.

Signed, dated and with the work number on the reverse: Somm 2011 Werk Nr. 1045, as well as signed and dated on the stretcher: P. Somm 2011.

110 x 110 cm.

Provenance: - Artist's studio. - Private collection Switzerland. "The circle and the cross are not constructions but powerful prototypes. Light, as a means of creating art, signifies dematerialisation and transcendence. Instead of closed areas, the goal is transparency and pulsating space; instead of fixed forms, fluctuating light; instead of borders, openness; instead of formal tension and solemn

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lapidary symmetry, weightlessness and floating.” (From: Peter Somm: Werke 1969-1983, Feststellungen 1984, from the exhibition catalogue Museum zu Allerheiligen Schaffhausen, www.petersomm.ch/statements) Peter Somm was born in Sulgen in 1940, studied in Fribourg, Vienna and Zurich and finally trained as an anaesthetist in Münsterlingen, Berlin, Zurich and St Gallen. Painting always accompanied him from his early student days: he attended painting courses Berlin and in Switzerland, but above all was self-taught in painting. From 1958 to 1969 Somm created an extensive early body of work, but he made no effort to exhibit these works, and instead immersed himself during this period in the oeuvre of Paul Klee and Johannes Itten. In his work he concentrated on developing his own style, characterised by a layer-like structure of continuous tiers of colour, and right-angled strips in a black-grey-white palette. In 1969 one of Somm’s acrylic paintings was included as part of an annual winter exhibition at the Helmhaus Zurich, which enabled him to enter the art scene and to be perceived as a creative artist. In 1972 he settled in Herrenschwanden with his wife and three children and continued to work part-time as an anaesthetist in a private clinic in Bern until 1999. Painting occupied him throughout the years, as he steadily searched for his “own kind of constructivism”. In 1984 he wrote: “If on contemplating a constructive work of art we first think of numbers, compare colours and form and look for geometric relationships, then this work is speaking primarily to the mind. Such forms of expression do not correspond to my outlook today. It is true I work with strictly constructive means, but I do not want to show that $2 + 2$ equals $1 + 3$. My aim is a constructive art, in which the Rational Constructive element moves increasingly into the background; certainly, it remains as a basis, but it is less and less part of the content. This vision of an open, dematerialised art demands that outlines and forms are abandoned. Triangles, squares and other figures are perceived rationally and, like divisions, shifts, turns and other geometric processes, are not suitable for generating feelings of vastness, infinity or transcendence. On the other hand, I also reject that entirely non-committal, nebulous blurring of colour. Through the structuring principle of a layered gradated continuous range of colours, I avoid the impression

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of both constructive hardness, as well as diffused haziness.”

(www.petersomm.ch/statements) After studying and elaborating on the foundations of his style in his early work, he then intensified his painting and turned to the theme of light. The glow and oscillation of light is the goal in each of his works. Peter Somm's light pictures examine three pictorial motifs: the horizon, the circle and the cross - his personal three archetypes or powerful prototypes. For Peter Somm light is a means of creating a work of art. Through the form of the circle (as eternal cyclical movement) or the horizon (continuous unlimited lines) he manages to create pulsating spaces. This is wonderfully demonstrated in the three works offered here at auction (Lot 3458-3460): his fundamentally simple symmetrical forms float in a state of weightlessness. The glow is created by the closely spaced parallel colour bands. His technique appears quite simple, but the execution is endowed with great precision. With a pair of compasses he sketches the lines in pencil and paints them individually with great precision and with minimal colour nuances. The closer you get to the original shape, the narrower the colour bands, the brighter the stripes become (Lot XY and XX). Through this colour gradation an effect of light is created. In his watercolour pictures the lightest stripe is usually the one with the least pigment. Gradually the white of the paper seems to appear. In his acrylic pictures his brightest stripes are the ones with the greatest number of colour layers, such as our Lot 3458. Many works, as Lot 3460, seek to create an effect of darkness, and through the outer light areas, the black circular form seems to shine out through the blue. In Peter Somm's oeuvre, his “painted light” emerges, bringing radiance and vibration to the work, so that an optical, three-dimensional, mythical and yet almost transcendent depth is achieved.

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